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SUBJECT: ORGANIZATIONAL OVERVIEW OF VIETNAM'S  
-- MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

1. (U) SUMMARY: A new Prime Ministerial degree in March 2003 reaffirmed the MFA's main diplomatic functions as the GVN's main foreign affairs agency and also confirmed its leadership over Vietnam's Border Commission and increasingly active Committee for Overseas Vietnamese. The new decree is unlikely to change the substance or style of the MFA's work, which is divided up among 28 regional and functional departments. The MFA continues to attract some of the brightest young Vietnamese students. MFA careers tend to be devoted to a single country and/or specialty. The Americas Department is notably strong, with most officials having served and/or studied in the U.S. END SUMMARY.

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NEW LEGAL FRAMEWORK  
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2. (U) Prime Ministerial Decree 21, issued March 10, confirmed the MFA's lead role as the GVN's main foreign affairs agency and identified its specific tasks. It updated and formalized a similar Decree 82 from November 10, 1993 on the MFA's tasks and responsibilities. According to this revised legal framework, the MFA -- under the leadership of the Government and Prime Minister -- has explicit duties, inter alia, to:

- establish or guide diplomatic and consular relations with other countries and international organizations;
- represent the nation and conduct diplomatic relations;
- manage representative activities in foreign countries and with international organizations, including the UN and others, according to international law;
- make arrangement for high level official visits overseas as well as receiving high-level foreign visitors;
- arrange conferences and seminars on international affairs;
- express the official viewpoints and positions of Vietnam on international issues;
- monitor foreign press reports regarding Vietnam;
- oversee the activities of foreign reporters in Vietnam;

and,

- protect the interests of the nation and the interests and rights of Vietnamese organizations and citizens overseas according to Vietnamese and international law.

3. (U) Decree 21 also ratified some new responsibilities and organizational changes that had been quietly introduced over the past decade, most notably oversight over Vietnam's Border Commission and its Committee on Overseas Vietnamese. (These slipped under MFA control in October 2001 and November 1995, respectively.) Both organizations have had more public roles in the past several years due to ongoing negotiations with both the PRC and Cambodia on border issues, and as the GVN increasingly reaches out to the Viet Kieu population, most recently during the U.S. visit of Deputy Prime Minister Nguyen Binh Din, who is also head of the latter Committee.

4. (U) According to Vu Thi Tinh, an expert in the MFA's Department for Organization and Personnel, Decree 21 should be viewed as part of the GVN's "administrative reform master plan," but should have little practical impact on the day-to-day functioning of the MFA. Tinh noted several key points in the decree:

- Previously, a minister-equivalent had headed the Border Commission but now a deputy minister, Le Cong Phung, oversees its work; and,
- Decree 21 created a new entity, the Center for External Economic Information and Informatics. Previously, this had existed as an office within the Department for Economic Affairs. Tinh said that the GVN decided to separate out this Center because MFA diplomatic activities "are more and more focused on economic cooperation and require more modern communications efforts."

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STRUCTURE  
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5. (U) Administratively, the MFA is broken down into 28 units, largely on regional or functional specialties. The regional Departments, each headed by a Director General and usually supported by 2-3 Deputy Directors General,

include:

- Americas: covering the U.S., Canada, Central and South Americas (its Director General has the concurrent title of Assistant Foreign Minister). One of its DDGs concurrently serves as the head of the inter-agency "Vietnam Office for Seeking Missing Personnel," which is our key interlocutor on all POW/MIA issues;
- West Asia - Africa: responsible for about 70 countries-- including Iraq -- although the GVN is without diplomatic presence in most of these;
- ASEAN: handling all ASEAN affairs and meetings -- including the ARF and PMC -- but not bilateral relations;
- Asia I: supervising ties with the PRC, Taiwan, the Koreas, Japan, and Mongolia;
- Asia II: overseeing relations with Australia, New Zealand, Laos, the Philippines, Indonesia, Brunei, Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore, Burma, Cambodia, and South Asia;
- Europe I: maintaining relations with Russia, the former Soviet republics, Eastern Europe, and Yugoslavia; and,
- Europe II: promoting ties with Western, Northern, and Southern Europe.

16. (U) Functional components, also usually headed by DGs, consist of:

- Department for External Policies (sometimes called the Policy Planning Department), which performs analyses and provides advice to help the MFA's leadership, similar to S/P and/or INR;
- Department for Economic Affairs, which collects and analyzes information concerning the world economics and develops economic policy proposals;
- Department for Multilateral Economic Cooperation, which provides analyses and advice on policies concerning international economic integration. This department also takes the lead on APEC issues, while the Ministry of Trade, with MFA participation, handles WTO issues;
- Department for International Laws and Treaties, which provides advice on legal matters concerning Vietnam's treaties and relations with other countries and international organizations, including the signing of international conventions (and is our interlocutor on counter-terrorism conventions, the ICOC, and the ICC);
- International Organizations, responsible for Vietnam's participation in more than 60 international organizations, as well as handling all of our human rights inquiries. The IO Department is also our interlocutor on the long-standing negotiations over a Counter-narcotics agreement;
- Department for Protocol;
- Department for Culture - UNESCO, which provides advice on policies in cultural cooperation and relations with different countries and with UNESCO;
- Department for Information and Press, which acts as the MFA's spokesperson and provides press advice concerning Vietnam's foreign policy. It also deals with resident foreign press members, issuing their visas and press credentials as well as requests for meetings and travel;
- Center for Foreign Press Service, which provides assistance to visiting foreign journalists. The center can arrange appointments, set up interviews and provides assistants/interpreters;
- Department for Organization and Personnel, the equivalent of State's Bureau of Human Resources;
- Department for Administration and Accountancy, responsible for the MFA's finances in Vietnam and overseas;
- Department for Consular Affairs, which manages consular relations, including our ongoing bilateral discussions on a protocol on adoptions. This Department also handled the 2001/2 Montagnard issues, including negotiations with UNHCR and Cambodia on the short-lived Tripartite Agreement, given its responsibility for Vietnamese citizens. In addition, this department, after receiving notification and documentation from the Protocol Department, issues visas to foreign diplomatic personnel;
- the Inspectorate, the MFA's internal auditor. It also deals with concerned letters of complaints and denunciation within its diplomatic community in and outside the country;
- the Executive Office, which coordinates the MFA's contacts with other ministries as well as diplomatic missions overseas;
- Committee for Overseas Vietnamese;
- Border Commission;
- Diplomatic Service of Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC), which handles the work of foreign consulates general there, including requests for meetings and travel;
- Institute for International Relations, a rough equivalent of NIFTAC, although it also offers undergraduate degrees for would-be diplomats and others interested in international affairs;
- International Affairs Weekly, the MFA's official journal;
- Center for External Economic Information and Informatics, which serves as a link for domestic economic organizations and foreign counterparts. In addition, the Center manages computer resources for the MFA; and,
- Department for Diplomatic Service Corps, which provides such services as housing and employment of local staff for the diplomatic community (although its role has diminished

dramatically as most missions nowadays are able directly to hire and to secure housing). The MFA also runs its own car rental agency, to handle the needs of visiting delegations.

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ASSIGNMENT PROCESS AND PRACTICES  
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17. (U) The MFA's Department for Organization and Personnel is responsible for MFA assignments, both domestic and foreign. Concerning foreign assignments, Huu Quoc Chinh, an expert in that department, said that the MFA's senior leadership gives this issue "a great deal of attention." An MFA internal committee, chaired by the Department for Organization and Personnel, reviews applications for assignments on behalf of the foreign minister or one of his deputies. According to Chinh, MFA officials are normally assigned only to the countries covered by the departments in which they are currently serving. This provides "more continuity and expertise," Chinh claimed. No one may be assigned overseas until he/she is beyond the MFA's probationary period of three to five years. However, in some "special" cases, the person can apply after one year, Chinh noted. Personnel from functional departments, however, have somewhat greater leeway in their overseas assignments, however.

18. (U) Separately, Tran Viet Tu, senior expert in the West Asia - Africa Department, pointed out that the GVN views the background and training in an individual closely before deciding on an overseas assignment. Similar to the Chinese system, he noted, Vietnamese diplomats tend to specialize in one area, building up an expertise in a language as well as political and cultural issues. Tu noted that, in his case, "it is unlikely" he would ever be assigned outside the Arab world, since he has the language and experience in that region.

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Comment  
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19. (U) The MFA continues to attract among the GVN's most talented and (not surprisingly) internationally savvy cadres, even in this era of growing private sector opportunities for the best and the brightest. Many are second generation diplomats, including most recently the son of former Ambassador to the U.S. and now Deputy Foreign Minister Le Van Bang (who has now sought reassignment from the ASEAN Department to the Americas Department). President Tran Duc Luong's son is also an MFA official.

110. (U) Our experience with the Americas Department in particular has been very good. Its North American division and US/Vietnam division staff appears among the most impressive within the MFA. Most (apart from AFM and DG Nguyen Duc Hung) have served previously and/or studied at the graduate level in the United States, and understand our culture and political system well. They likely sometimes find themselves in the uncomfortable position of having to deliver a demarche that they know may well be counter-productive when dealing with us. The strident official reactions to irritants like the Vietnam Human Rights Act and catfish dumping cases likely originate from the senior leadership and/or the Party's Commission on External Relations, where the levels of expertise on the U.S. are less strong and where ideology plays a more central role. In such cases, the advice of the more knowledgeable Americas staff may not count heavily enough, unfortunately.  
BURGHARDT